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The Iroquois Confederacy

ITS POLITICAL SYSTEM, MILITARY SYSTEM,
MARRIAGES, DIVORCES, PROPERTY
RIGHTS, ETC.

CHICAGO :
RUFUS BLANCHARD,
1902

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INTRODUCTION.

The Druid age of England was its age of heroic virtues. There was no literature there then, no laws, no prisons, and, substantially, no crime. Withal, this age produced the elements of England's present grandeur in everything that pertains to this age. But during this age, there was an influence at work in pagan Greece destined to act as schoolmaster to the English people to produce such a result.

The Iroquois Nation, who inhabited the present state of New York previous to the advent of white men, may be compared in some respects to the ancient Druids of England. They had their heroic virtues and their traditional literature. They had their unwritten laws, with penalties for the transgression of them, which could not be evaded. Their political wisdom laid the foundation for their nationality on a similar plan to that which has been practiced by European nations. They were justly called the "Romans of the New World," and their influence upon our colonial system and upon its ultimate destinies is manifest in its political and financial system. It is an interesting study to arrive at the facts, how this remarkable people rose to so much prominence as to foreshadow a financial and political policy that is with us now.

RUFUS BLANCHARD.

CHICAGO, October, 1902.

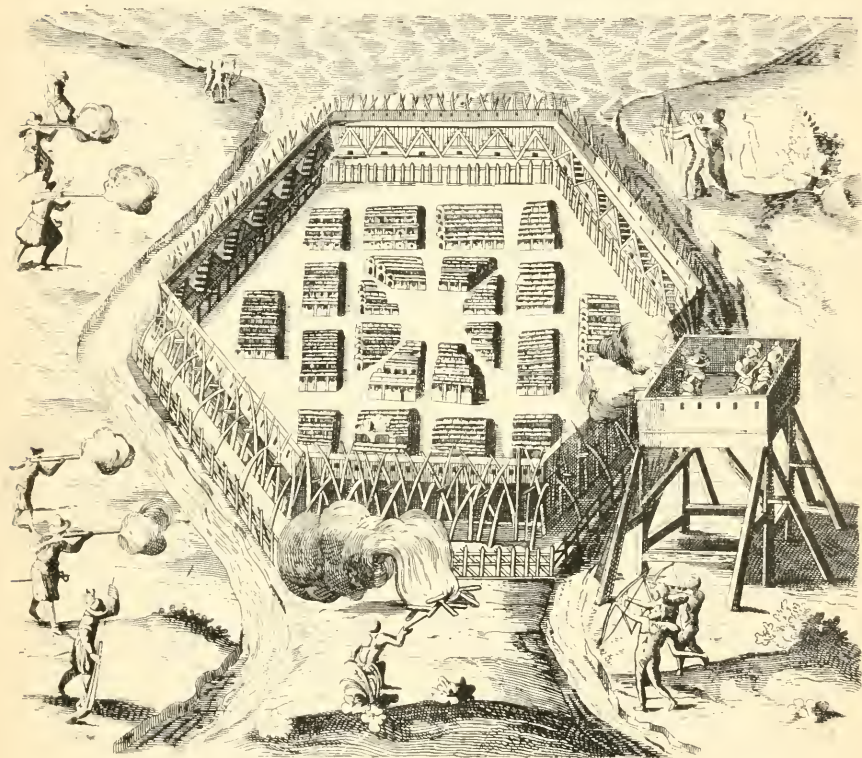
THE IROQUOIS — THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE UNITED STATES.

Of the three nations who first began the settlements of North America, the Spanish was the first; they settled at St. Augustine in Florida in 1565. The French was the next; they settled at Port Royal (now Annapolis) on the Bay of Fundy in 1604, also at Quebec on the St. Lawrence river in 1608. The English settled at Jamestown on the James river in 1607, and at Plymouth in 1620. Of these nations the Spanish was the only one that disregarded the force and influence of the aborigines of the soil, making no attempt at any political alliance with them: and it is doubtless due to this hauteur and the intolerant disposition that produced it, that Spain lost all her possessions on this continent soon after she came into juxtaposition with the French or the English colonists. Both of these two latter nations were circumspectful in their demeanor toward the natives, and each took early measures to form alliances with them. Neither of them at first had any knowledge of the vast extent and value of the great interior of North America. Fortunately for the English, their interests became identified with the Iroquois confederacy from the first; and unfortunately for the French, they became the enemies of this confederacy by having allied themselves to the Adirondacks and other tribes of Canada contiguous to their settlements, which tribes were enemies of the Iroquois.

The Dutch exploration of the Hudson river bears the date of 1609, and their first settlement at Fort

Orange (now Albany) the date of 1615. From thenceforward there was an unremitting rivalry in the fur trade between the Dutch of the Hudson river and the French of the St. Lawrence river. When the English, under the duke of York, took possession of New Amsterdam (now New York) in 1664, and of the entire Hudson river country with this conquest, none of the conditions existing between the Iroquois confederacy and the Dutch were changed; but, on the contrary, commercial relations consisting of an exchange of furs and peltries on one side and firearms and trinkets on the other continued the alliance of their interests, and strengthened their friendship. Pending this increasing friendliness between the English and the Iroquois, the French were almost constantly at war with this powerful confederacy: sometimes to defend their Canadian allies and sometimes to defend even themselves from Iroquois invasion. One of the first acts of French hostility against the Iroquois had place soon after Champlain had settled Quebec in 1608, at which time he unwittingly consented to lead a party of his allies against their old time foes, the Iroquois, and met them the next year, 1609, on the banks of Lake Champlain, defeating them in battle, the Indian weapons—bows and arrows—being insufficient to match the firearms of the French. Later, in 1615, Champlain, at the head of a small company of French soldiers, joined some Hurons in an expedition against the Senecas, one of the five Iroquois nations south of Lake Ontario. Proceeding into the enemy's country to the neighborhood of Lake Canandaigua, he discovered a fort occupied by the enemy, which he attacked after some skirmishes with the enemy outside of its inclosure, accompanied with losses in killed and wounded on both sides. The French attack against this fort lasted three hours, and resulted in the wounding of a few French soldiers and more of the Huron allies. Champlain himself had received three painful, but not

dangerous, wounds, when the French and their allies retreated. This Indian fort was a masterpiece of workmanship for defense, so built as to shield its defenders from attack, its barricades being about thirty feet high. As will be seen in the picture of it, here-with presented, the French had built a platform on



ABORIGINAL IROQUOIS FORT.

trestle work as high as the fort, and twenty stalwart men carried this platform from where it was built to its walls. From its height, which commanded the inside ground of the fort, sharpshooters were stationed; but the foes were concealed behind ingenious constructions of woodwork in the fort itself.

The most characteristic name ever given to the Iroquois confederacy was the "Romans of the New World."

This confederacy first consisted of the Mohawks, the Onondagas, the Senecas, the Oneidas, the Cayugas. In 1715 the Tuscaroras, a tribe from North Carolina who spoke the same language, were admitted into the confederacy. How this tribe, who were evidently of Iroquois stock, had wandered to that place is not known, but it is known that they had been hard pressed by the neighboring tribes in that vicinity, and naturally drifted toward their kinsfolk, the Iroquois, for protection. They were admitted into the league as a constituent tribe on terms of equality and independence, except that they were not allowed to be represented in the general council of sachems.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois, including the Tuscaroras, were subdivided into ~~tribes~~^{CLANS}, which were arranged in two divisions, and named as follows :

Wolf, Bear, Beaver, Turtle.

Deer, Snipe, Heron, Hawk.

The Senecas had eight tribes, the Cayugas eight, the Tuscaroras seven, the Onondagas eight, the Oneidas three and the Mohawks three. By the original laws of the league, neither of these tribes could intermarry. Either of the first four tribes could intermarry with either of the last four. When a young man went to another tribe for a wife, the mothers of the lovers respectively must negotiate for the marriage. These laws made a still stronger bond in the league. Under them the husband and wife were of different tribes. The children always followed the tribe of the mother, who inherited the property of her deceased husband, and the value of this property, however small, must necessarily be entailed to a different tribe from that to which the deceased husband belonged. The son could not inherit his father's sachemship or wampum. These

laws of heredity strengthened the socialistic ties of the different tribes. They were strictly obeyed and could not be deviated from except under penalty of social ostracism. Divorces were seldom desired, but if any inharmony existed between married couples, the mothers of each party were expected to settle such differences. In case they could not be settled amicably either party was at liberty to break the marriage relation without censure.

In their religion they had no word in their language which could express profanity to the Great Spirit (their deity), whom every one revered with pious adoration.

According to the best traditionary testimony, the Iroquois League or Ho-dé-no-sau-nee was formulated by Da-gä-no-wé-da, one of the wise men of the Onondaga Nation. Under his eloquent tutelage he induced the wise men and chiefs of the Iroquois Nations to hold a "Council Fire" on the northern shore of Onondaga lake, where after grave consultation the celebrated League was entered into. The object of this League was for mutual protection against other tribes. The principle involved aimed at an empire, wherewith to hold the "balance of power," not essentially different from the doctrine of the balance of power question which has prevailed for more than a century in Europe. At the formation of the League fifty men noted for their wisdom were appointed sachems (each tribe being represented), with authority to make all political laws for the government of the entire Iroquois Nation. The sachemship was made hereditary, as well as the individual title. The ratification of the general council of all the sachems was necessary at the ceremony of investing each with his title and confirming his authority. The sachems were of equal rank, but, like our own representative men in congress, their influence was commensurate with their political sagacity and eloquence. The power of the sachems was found insufficient to

answer the wants of the Nation, and some years after the founding of the League the office of "Chiefs" was instituted, whose authority was given them by the popular voice according to merit, deserved for some act of bravery or for wise counsel. To the chiefs were assigned military expeditions and council in civil matters when occasion required it. The council of sachems, at the "raising up of a chief," substituted a new name for his original name, appropriate to his qualifications. The orator "Red Jacket," when made a chief, was given the name "Sa-go-ye-wat-ha"—"Keeper Awake," in appreciation of his powers of eloquence, instead of his original name, "O-te-ti-än-i"—"Always Ready." The foregoing tribal relations to the entire League resemble the political status of the United States—the different tribes in their respective localities representing the different states of the American Union, subject to congress and the United States senate. The states are governed by the constitution, which has to be guarded with tenacity to prevent infringement upon its provisions. An unwritten law among the Iroquois was their safeguard against the violation of their unwritten constitution by tribes or individuals.

Ho-dé-no-sau-nee (People of the Long House) besides the People of the Confederacy, was a term with the Iroquois Nation that had a similar significance to the Iroquois Nation that the term Uncle Sam has to the people of the United States. Between the Hudson river on the east and the Niagara river on the west, and from the St. Lawrence on the north to the Susquehanna on the south, the Long House, or the domains of the Iroquois tribes, was spread out and constituted the fairest portions of the entire country, as it was known in colonial times. The Onondaga Nation, being situated in central position, were made the keepers of both the council brand and of the wampum, by which the structure and principles of their government, and their laws and treaties were memorized (a retentive

memory was a requisite necessary in the sachem appointed as keeper of the wampum). At stated periods, usually in the autumn of each year, the sachems of the League assembled in council, at Onondaga, to legislate for the common welfare. Exigencies of a public or domestic character often led to summoning of their council at other seasons; but the place of session was not confined to Onondaga. It could be held in the territory of either of the Nations, under established usages.

Though the Iroquois brought the Delawares and other tribes to the south under temporary allegiance, yet their greatest force was employed to subjugate tribes to the west of them, especially the Illinois tribes, who had felt the weight of their avenging hand before the French came to their rescue. La Salle, in 1682, had persuaded the Senecas, by dint of much flattery and many presents, to allow him to build a vessel at the eastern extremity of Lake Erie, wherewith to convey men and goods to the Illinois country. The same year Tonty, his lieutenant, built a fort on Starved Rock, for defense of both the French and the Illinois tribes against Iroquois invasion, which gave the Illinois tribes a respite from the visitation of their enemies; but the French never succeeded in establishing uninterrupted communication between Canada and the west sufficiently to prevent the English from getting the lion's share of the western fur trade through Iroquois intervention and protection. The ambition of the French during these and following years was to possess and control the St. Lawrence valley, the Mississippi valley and the region of the Great Lakes. The English, on their part, held the Atlantic seaboard and the Hudson river country with a firm grip. Their alliance with the Iroquois made them invulnerable, but this same alliance rendered French possessions precarious. This uncertainty prevailed till the French and Indian war began in 1755. It raged seven years. The French had in

their alliance the entire Indian tribes of Canada and the valley of the Mississippi, while the English relied upon the faithful Iroquois to help fight their battles. For years the issue trembled in the balance, till at last the conquest of Quebec, by General Wolfe, settled this stupendous question, and substantially gave the entire country to the English in 1760.

At the close of this war there was a strong effort made in the British cabinet to leave the French in possession of Canada and the Mississippi valley, asserting that the French power left here would be a constant menace to the English colonists: thereby insuring their loyalty to the mother country, in order to protect themselves from French aggression. Pitt, the great English statesman, would not listen to this unnecessary and timid policy, as he termed it, and insisted on driving the French entirely out of North America, and establishing English colonial rule in its place.

During this eventful war, had the Iroquois fought in favor of the French instead of the English, the whole interior of the continent, embracing the countries along the St. Lawrence river, the great chain of lakes and the Mississippi valley, including the Ohio river valley, must have remained in the hands of the French and remained indefinitely under French laws. Under this regime there could have been no revolt of the thirteen American colonies, at least for a century. There could have been no United States, no Great Republic to stimulate invention and introduce the reforms which have startled the world during the last century. There would have been no WASHINGTON, no FRANKLIN and no LINCOLN.

CHICAGO, May, 1881.

RUFUS BLANCHARD,

Dear Sir:

We have received and read your book, "The Discovery and Conquests of the Northwest, with the history of Chicago," and take this means of bearing our testimony to the zeal, industry, thorough research and faithful record made by you, of the times and events covered by your volume. We think you are entitled to public gratitude for the ability with which you have collected this store of historical detail concerning the early history of the Northwest, especially of Illinois and Chicago, and for the entertaining manner in which you have presented that history for the instruction of present and future generations.

J. YOUNG SCAMMON,
H. W. BLODGETT,
WILLIAM BLAIR,
B. W. RAYMOND,
C. B. FARWELL,
MARSHALL FIELD,
O. W. NIXON,
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WM. ALDRICH,
G. S. HUBBARD,
J. D. CATON,
PERRY H. SMITH,
GRANT GOODRICH,
WM. HENRY SMITH,

The above is a copy of a circular presented me at the time of the publication of the book described. It is now to be republished with revisions and another volume added to it—the whole to be complete in twelve parts.

R. B.

CHICAGO, January, 1899.

RUFUS BLANCHARD,

Dear Sir:

Realizing, as we do, the importance of an authentic history of Chicago from cotemporary sources, to be handed down from our own times to futurity, we, the undersigned, hereby approve the opinions given, in the above circular, by the signers thereof, and we confide to you our assistance in continuing the work.

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James B. Bradwell
Melville E. Stone
O. F. Fuller
L. Z. Leiter
Wm. H. Higinbotham
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